

# A TASTE OF FREEDOM



Published By



**RAZE THE WALLS**





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gradually rise in his mind. That is how religion works on people who have been content to get by as best they can. It gets them started on facing the big issues and making responsible decisions."

- J.H. Newman, 1986 (1864), *Loss and Gain*, Oxford: OUP, pages 15-16 and 27

People who think in the way Newman describes, accepting doctrine and dogma, are not anarchists, but such thinking forms a stage in the progression towards anarchism, for only to the extent that people formulate their ideas clearly, and hold them firmly, can they appreciate the force of an attack upon them. Let us hope that Newman's young hero went on to become an anarchist.

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This pamphlet is comprised of texts downloaded off the internet and compiled as a basic introduction to anarchist theory and history. Specifically, these texts provide answers to basic questions about anarchism and give a detailed account of the largest anarchist inspired revolutionary event in history; the Spanish Revolution and Civil War of 1936-39.

These are but a few articles we found to be good introductions to the ideas which lie behind our work. The appearance of an article in this pamphlet, though, does not necessarily mean that we as a network agree wholeheartedly with every aspect of it, but in general these texts represent the social and political ideas we adhere to and advocate. Further information or materials on anarchism can be obtained by contacting one of our groups. Take care and remember that a taste is never enough!

RTW!/August 1997

*"We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accomodate ourselves for a time. For you must not forget that we can also build these palaces and cities, here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers. We can build others to take their place, and better ones. We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts, and that world is growing in this minute."*

- Buenaventura Durrutti, Spanish anarchist militant



## An Introduction to Anarchism

Liz A. Highleyman

This essay was written in 1988 by Liz and the (now defunct)  
Black Rose anarchist group in Boston, MA

### What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political philosophy that is shrouded in misconception. This largely do to the fact that anarchism is a truly diverse way of thinking, one which cannot be characterized by simple slogans or party lines. In fact, if you ask 10 anarchists for their description of anarchism, you are likely to get 10 different than just a political philosophy; it is a way of life that encompasses political, pragmatic and personal aspects. The basic tenant of anarchism is that hierarchical authority be it state, church, patriarchy or economic elite is not only unnecessary, but is inherently detrimental to the maximization of human potential. Anarchists generally believe that human beings are capable of managing their own affairs on the basis of creativity, cooperation, and mutual respect. It is believed that power is inherently corrupting, and that authorities are inevitably more concerned with self-perpetuation and increasing their own power than they are with doing what is best for their constituents.

Anarchists generally maintain that ethics are a personal matter, and should be based upon concern for others and the well being of society, rather than upon laws imposed by a legal or religious authority (including revered laws such as the U.S. Constitution). Most anarchist philosophies hold that individuals are responsible for their own behavior. Paternalistic authorities foster a dehumanized mindset in which people expect elites to make decisions for them and meet their needs, rather than thinking and acting for themselves. When an authority arrogates to itself the right to overrule the most fundamental personal moral decisions, such as what is worth killing or dying for (as in military conscription or abortion), human freedom is immeasurably diminished. Anarchists acknowledge the connection between various forms of oppression - including sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and national chauvinism - and recognize the futility of focusing opposition on one form of injustice while others continue to exist.

Anarchists believe that the means one uses to transform the world must be in accord with the ends that one hopes to achieve. While anarchists disagree about strategies and tactics, including the need for formal organizations and the use of violent action to overthrow existing violent institutions, most agree that the focus must not be on merely destroying the current order, but on fashioning new, more humane and more rational alternatives to take its place.

### Anarchists in History

Anarchists have played a part in revolutionary movements throughout history. The French Revolution begun in 1789 had a strong proto-anarchist element. Anarchists such as Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, and Enrico Malatesta played an

something about them. For that you need the power, the emotion and the drive that religion brings to bear.

Religion as we have known it for so long goes sharply against anarchist beliefs, using authority rather than reason. It recognizes your freedom to accept or reject it, but adds that if you make the wrong choice you will burn in hell. (In Buddhism, that you will remain bound and suffering on the wheel.) Offering a love prepared to destroy your body for the good of your soul, it operates on a level that bypasses the ordinary attachment to comfort and custom, using images and symbols making their appeal to deep levels of the psyche.

Even so, it fails at least as often as it succeeds, many remaining absorbed in their own affairs, taken up with pictures and personalities, immersed unquestioningly in the state, throughout their lives. (And of those who do start on and principles, once it has kicked-started you into accepting responsibility instead of just taking life and society and rulers for granted, then other movements can usefully approach you, movements more thoughtful than religion, more analytical, more critical.) As those movements, one after another, show themselves incapable of doing what they aim at, as liberalism, free thought, socialism, atheism and Communism all fail to bring any rapid and radical improvement, eventually anarchism gets its chance. But it is religion, more than anything else, that gets these changes started.

A great many anarchists believe that people have a natural tendency towards anarchy but get turned away from it, religion being one of the forces responsible. This has no more validity than the equivalent belief of conservatives, fascists, communists and in fact the members of every political movement, that people generally would support them if only some evil influence bosses, extremists, agitators, Jews or immigrants did not interfere. For people to live together without external government they need a high level of self-control, and we are not born with this. It has to be learnt, and religion, ordinary, orthodox, conventional, authoritarian religion, is the most effective method yet found for getting that learning process started.

Let me wind up with a quotation from one of the more prominent religious authorities of recent times, J.H. Newman:

"When, then, men for the first time look upon the world of politics or religion ... they have no consistency in their argument; that is, they argue one way to-day, and not exactly the other way to-morrow, but indirectly the other way, at random. Their lines of argument diverge; nothing comes to a point; there is no one center in which their mind sits, on which their judgment of men and things proceeds. This is the state of many men all through life; and ruled by others, or are pledged to a course. Else they are at the mercy of the winds and the waves; and, without being Radical, Whig, Tory or, Conservative, High Church or Low Church, they do Whig acts, Tory acts, Catholic acts, and heretical acts, as a likable, easy-going young student of divinity, begins to experience the effect upon his thinking of a serious commitment to religion: Contradictions could not both be real; when an affirmative was true, a negative was false. All doctrines could not be equally sound; there was a right and a wrong. The theory of dogmatic truth, as opposed to latitudinarianism (he did not know their names or their history, or suspect what was going on within him) had ...



they act or speak as anarchists, when they apply the results of their thinking, when the anarchist movement or anarchist journals concern themselves with particular people, they do so less for the sake of their personal qualities than for their value as symbols or instances, either of oppression and suffering or of resistance to these. Anarchism interests itself less in persons than in ideas, concepts of freedom, hierarchy, anarchy, the state and the like. These abstractions cannot be pictured, and as one consequence of this anarchist publications consist mainly of cold print.

On the one hand the mass media, offering pictures and personalities virtually without ideas. On the other anarchism, offering ideas with rarely a personality or a picture. And between them, offering ideas in the form of pictures and personalities, forming a bridge between the other two, stands religion. Each of the great religions offers personifications of its ideals, and are full of minor entities, saints and the like, presenting secondary features. Unifying concrete and abstract, these figures provide a route from the primal interest in personalities towards the sophistication of a commitment to general ideas; in philosophical terms, from the particular to the universal. Opening the way to individual development transcending its own limitations, religion performs a similar function in social affairs.

It has been largely the religious people insisting, against all attempts at suppression, on giving voice to their particular doctrines, who have established the rights and liberties that now enable anarchism to function. Buddhist monks have immolated themselves in protest against attempts at suppression; Christian martyrs have suffered at the pillory and the stake for the suppression of other faiths, and even in the most advanced countries today this tradition continues in a milder form, each congregation seeking to impose its own regime on the schools.

Milton's *Areopagitica* with its subtitle *A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing* is a foundation document here. He is already near the limits of orthodoxy, perhaps beyond them, yet his work still shows, alongside the courage and determination that supported the movement for freedom in religious affairs, also the narrowness of its intentions. He would restrict permissible dissidence to Protestant sects, excluding Roman Catholicism and banning free thought: 'that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners no law can possibly permit. When feeling enthusiasm for his famous declaration, in the same work, that a good Booke is the precious life-blood of a master spirit', one needs to inquire rather carefully just what he meant by 'good' in this connection. Milton was no humanist. He and his fellows would have been horrified to learn that they were ensuring a considerable degree of freedom for anarchism to operate, but their efforts have produced that result. And their success in promoting the freedoms of speech, publication and assembly arose, very largely, from the fact that they were not revolutionaries, outside the pale, but adherents of a respectable religion, people committed not to human welfare, or rationality, or freedom, but to religious beliefs.

The freedoms anarchists now use arose as a side-effect of authoritarian religion. I don't say a word against atheism, rationalism, reason and argument in their place. We need them among ourselves, and we need them for dealing with people who are anywhere near becoming anarchists. But they offer little help in getting anybody started, in arousing the first awareness that things are wrong in the world and we ought to be doing

essential part in the development of revolutionary anarchist theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anarchists played a substantial role in the revolutionary movements in Russia in 1905 and 1917, but were suppressed, often ruthlessly, once the Bolsheviks had consolidated power. The Spanish Revolution of 1936-1939 set the stage for the most widely known large-scale manifestation of anarchist practice, in which anarcho-syndicalist organizations (the Iberian Anarchist Federation [FAI] and National Workers' Confederation [CNT]) successfully created workable, non-hierarchical social and economic alternatives.

In the United States, as well as in Mexico and Latin America, there was an anarcho-syndicalist influence within the trade union movement (for example the Industrial Workers of the World). Prominent anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman participated in a variety of radical causes throughout the early 1900s. There was a strong anarchist current in many of the social change and alternative lifestyle movements of the 1960s (including parts of the feminist movement, the gay liberation movement and the anti-war and free speech movements), although in many cases these were overshadowed, if not frankly repressed, by Marxist/Leninist/Maoist currents.

### What Anarchism is Not

In an effort to clarify what anarchism is, it is useful to examine what anarchism is not.

**Communism:** While many anarchists value communalism and collectivism, anarchists reject the totalitarianism of the existing and recently fallen communist, or more accurately Marxist-Leninist, states. The rift between anarchists and Marxists developed as early as the 1870s as anarchists perceived that the Marxists were perpetuating authoritarianism under a different name. Marxist-Leninists have traditionally emphasized the need for a vanguard party and the "dictatorship of the proletariat", ideas which are fundamentally opposed to the anarchist focus on anti-authoritarianism and maximum individual freedom. Although orthodox Marxism predicts that the state will "wither away" with time, we have repeatedly seen in Communist regimes a consolidation of state power and its attendant repression and insistence on conformity.

**Libertarianism:** Libertarians are often confused with anarchists and do, in fact, overlap in many respects. Both share an emphasis on individual freedom and the desire to do away with the state. Many libertarians assign primary importance to the individual and emphasize the principle of enlightened self-interest. Many anarchists tend to focus more on mutual aid and efforts to improve the circumstances of all members of the community. Libertarianism is most often characterized by its economic viewpoint, which places maximum value on unimpeded free market capitalism (some proponents call themselves "anarcho-capitalists"), condones the use of force in the defense of private property, opposes any governmental interference that impedes efforts to maximize personal economic gain, and discounts values that can not be measured in economic (typically monetary) terms. While libertarians are anti-state, they often are not opposed to domination and hierarchy in all its forms (there is often a strain of "survival of the fittest" or "[economic] might makes right" in the libertarian philosophy), and do not seek to radically alter societal power relations, especially those based on economic power.

Anarchists tend to have a more socialist perspective, and favor doing away with



any system in which the wealthy can achieve disproportionate benefit while the less fortunate suffer undue hardship. While anarchists value individual initiative, intelligence, and creativity, it is recognized that those who possess such talents to a lesser degree should still be treated with respect and justice. Objectivists are an extremist type of Libertarian. The Libertarian Party is relatively moderate, and tends to focus on issues like electoral reform, abolishing drug laws, and reducing governmental regulation.

Many libertarians are "minarchists" who believe that some form of government is necessary but that it should be as minimal and unobtrusive as possible. The question of what type of economic system would exist in an anarchist society is an open one. Some anarchists believe that all forms of capital and the market economy must be abolished, others favor a system that promotes worker ownership and full participatory democracy within a market economy, and still others believe that a variety of economic systems can co-exist as long as they do not try to impose their systems and values on each other.

**Liberalism:** The prevailing political notions in this country equate anarchism with leftism, and leftism with liberalism, but there are real differences, both quantitative and qualitative. The idea of "the left" is problematic in the 1990s, since much of modern politics tends to fall outside the traditional left (liberal)/right (conservative) spectrum. Although most anarchists do support "progressive" causes, anarchism does not really have a place within the traditional political spectrum. Some theorists have proposed a matrix that looks at degree of economic authoritarianism and degree of social authoritarianism as two separate axes; often those who favor economic liberty oppose social liberty and vice versa.

Much of modern progressive politics is based on "identity politics," the idea that one's primary concerns and alliances should be made on the basis of race, gender and/or sexual orientation. Although many anarchists are heavily invested in identity politics, a more comprehensive anarchist philosophy looks forward to a time when people will not need to focus so much on such categorizations. While liberals tend to advocate efforts to reform the existing system (through such means as voting, lobbying, and organized demonstrating), anarchists have a more radical view, and wish to replace corrupt institutions entirely, and refashion a more humane society by means of direct action, without reliance on any form of statist intervention.

While anarchists generally recognize the validity of evolutionary as well as revolutionary change, they acknowledge that in order to achieve a true reordering of society it is necessary to eradicate hierarchical dominance relations wherever they exist; this has not historically been a priority of liberals. Anarchists recognize that the structures of power themselves (be they capitalist or communist, "democratic" or totalitarian) are the root of the problem, and as such, cannot be the basis for a solution. Although some anarchists engage in voting and organized protest in the belief that even small localized improvements are worthwhile, they recognize that such activities are merely interim steps, which one must go beyond in order to achieve real and lasting change.

**Nihilism:** In contrast to the "anti-everything" credo of nihilists, anarchists do not promote random violence, destruction, and "every man for himself" lawlessness (although there are always a few with this philosophy who call themselves "anarchists"). The common perception that anarchy is equivalent to chaos is an unfortunate misconception arising from

beyond verbal dissidence and many never have occasion to realize the distinction between church and state.

We'll get to anarchism in just a minute. First, a look at fascism. Here the Leader comes about as close to deification as civilization permits and, significantly, Nazism tried to set up rituals and institutions replacing orthodox religion. Move along to conservatism, and the leader figure, although still prominent, starts to shrink. Where Hitler set himself above the law, the Prime Minister or President submits to it; he and his ministers can doubtless find gaps to wriggle through, but they can't just ride over it. In conservatism impersonal institutions, things like law, tradition, parliament, the monarchy, start to attract the loyalty enjoyed in fascism by the Leader.

In the more thoughtful movements, in liberalism, humanism, free thought, socialism, atheism, communism, the leader shrinks movements all differ from religion, but they all carry forward the pattern of behavior that religion introduced, offering something bigger than ourselves and urging us to join it. As they become more critical of present society the god, the hero, the personal se things occupy the position once held by God and later by the personal leader.

Anarchism retains the pattern of behavior first introduced by religion. Anarchists will sometimes go along with this far enough to agree that religion has had its uses, while arguing that now it has become a burden we would be better without. They would do away with it, explaining to people in the first place why it's better to go straight for anarchism. Their efforts in this direction have not met with overwhelming success, and the reason begins to appear when we compare the mass media with anarchist publications.

On the one hand, pictures and personalities. Television, almost wholly pictorial and the supreme mass medium, is the one which comes closest to presenting actual people as we meet them in daily life, and this holds good especially for the programs which draw the mass audiences. All the great popular T.V. successes which run and run, present stories of real people, identifiable personalities whom the audience can get to know almost as they know their own families, people living ordinary lives with just enough of the unusual to add dramatic novelty. The mass-circulation newspapers follow suit to the best of their abilities. On one ordinary day recently a count showed the NY Times and USA Today, taken together, averaging approximately two pictures to the page, excluding cartoons and advertisements. Most of these were large, from a quarter-page upwards, and almost without exception they showed named people, personal people. As mass entertainment, literature comes a poor second to the pictorial media but here, too, the works winning the big sales almost invariably offer stories of people presented as individual personalities.

Anarchism, too, takes great interest in people, but from a different angle. The individual anarchism speaks of will never burgle you or break a truncheon over your head, but it will never sleep with you or buy you a drink either; it is not a concrete human being at all but a sexless, classless, colorless, jobless, ageless, raceless, featureless, impersonal abstraction, quite as real as the person immediately apparent to the senses, but in a different way; it has the same sort of reality as the average family with two-and-a-bit children. In the ordinary course of daily life anarchists take the normal interest in people as persons; this is fundamental and it does not disappear in the course of development. But when



tation. We live totally merged in the state, submitting to it without question, not even knowing that we are doing so. That is the farthest from anarchism that it's possible for a civilized person to be, and religion tries to shake us out of this condition.

It makes little use of rational argument, for that has little impact on people holding this attitude. It appeals to them in their own terms, offering immense personal advantage eternal blessedness, and often worldly benefits too if they will only love and follow the superhuman leader. Presented as a person, with all the immediacy that implies, this hero figure yet reaches far beyond the sphere of merely personal affairs. He is engaged in the universal struggle between good and evil (in Buddhism the quest for Nirvana), so that those who follow him find themselves carried into a wider sphere of activity. Religion brings people to take part in affairs that turn out eventually to be social, and it thereby lifts them over the first step on the climb towards anarchism.

Once we join a movement, any movement, once we step into line behind a leader, any leader, our unquestioning submission to the state starts to break down. Totalitarian states gain that title from their attempts to suppress every activity in any way independent of the state, churches among them, and they do this because every movement, even an authoritarian, conservative, government supporting established Church, forms a distinct power-center possessing a degree of autonomy; the people who choose to join a Church thereby begin to distinguish themselves from the state. Thomas Beckett was only one of many turbulent priests. Christ told his followers to pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but his teaching had raised the question. Once Christians began to think about what was due to Caesar, instead of just paying it, Caesar no longer enjoyed his former security.

Some of the biggest; early states, Egypt and China for example, operated as theocracies under a divine ruler, state and church merged together. Yet even here a distinction appears; priests busy collecting taxes cannot at the same time perform religious ceremonies, and this difference of function leads to structural distinction, the church hiving off from the state. Once a distinct church with its own hierarchy has appeared, then pluralism is on the way, to be followed by democracy, and whether the priests like it or not, whether they know it or not, these bring anarchism behind them.

In a recent issue of Freedom Donald Room has a cartoon that makes the point, though he may not have meant it in quite this way. A preacher smugly condemns the Irish bombers as godless, selfish, anarchic and cowardly. Donald's hair trigger heroine, Wildcat, goes through the roof at this, protesting that it's just the opposite of the truth. The bombers are highly disciplined, prepared to sacrifice themselves. Far from being godless or anarchic they are religious, potential martyrs, the very stuff of which the Church is made. We can say the same of other terrorists. They are not anarchists, but neither are they simply accepting what they find around them; by standing up and fighting it they show the beginnings of independent individuality.

When people choose to attack a government, even if they do so in support of another one, and however misguided they may be in their reasons or their methods, they approach closer to anarchism than the great numbers who simply accept the state. Everybody who takes up religion sets out along that same path, even though few of them go

widespread belief, instilled by those in power, that authority is necessary to maintain order. Anarchists believe that an efficient, organized, and just society can be achieved on a non-hierarchical, decentralized, and participatory basis.

### Some Issues of Contention

Anarchists hold disparate views on many issues. One of the major areas of disagreement is the question of the individual versus the community. Individualist anarchists place primary importance on the freedom of the individual, while anarcho-communists (and anarcho-syndicalists) focus on the benefit of the social group at large, and mutualists lie somewhere in between. In an ideal anarchist society, it is hoped that the needs of the community as a whole can be met in a just manner without unduly impinging on the free will and self-determination of the individuals within it.

Another debate within the anarchist movement concerns the issues of ecology and technology. Classical anarchism displays similarities to the traditional Marxian notions of the value of science and rationalism, and the belief that technological progress generally benefits society. Many modern anarchists believe that technology is inherently neither good nor evil, but that it must be scrutinized and applied in a socially responsible manner in order to best serve those who use it and are affected by it. Other contemporary anarchists have an anti-technology, Ecology centered perspective (the most extreme being primitivists and neo-Luddites), and believe that an anarchist society can only be achieved by abandoning technological advances and returning to a more primitive, localized and ecologically harmonious way of life.

The issue of nationalism is also important. In general, anarchists advocate the idea of internationalism (or rather, 'non-nationalism') and view nationalism and patriotism as manifestations of the state's attempt to increase its power by promoting artificial divisions among people. The nation-state is a construct that serves the interests of various elites, while the lower strata of the population remains in similar deplorable circumstances throughout the world. Despite this, some anarchists maintain that it is worthwhile to support certain national liberation struggles (such as the efforts of the Palestinians in the middle east, Black nationalists in the U.S., and oppressed indigenous peoples everywhere) in the belief that smaller independent nations, albeit authoritarian, are preferable to exploitative, monolithic empires.

### Currents within the Modern Anarchist Movement

Today's "anarchist movement" can more accurately be viewed as a collection of different movements that have various political and philosophical features in common. Building on, and sometimes diverging from, the principles of classical anarchism, there are a variety of groups that are enlarging the scope of contemporary anarchism and redefining traditional notions of anarchy.

Anarcha-feminists meld the ideals of feminism and anarchism. Anarcha-feminists focus on the liberation of women and the role of the patriarchy more than classical anarchists, but not to the exclusion of other forms of oppression (as some other types of feminism have done). Not all women anarchists consider themselves anarcha-feminists,



nor must an anarchy-feminist be female - the distinction is largely a matter of how "woman-centered" one's values are and which aspects of domination are emphasized. As is the case with many present day political movements, the issue of gender separatism remains unresolved. On one hand, the perpetuation within the anarchist movement of the same artificial gender divisions that have been imposed by the hierarchical and patriarchal social order may be inimical to the creation of true equality and to the breaking down of barriers which anarchists hope to accomplish. On the other hand, many women feel the need to maintain a women's space within a movement that has traditionally been male-dominated, and believe that the validity of women's concerns must be recognized and integrated into the anarchist philosophy before unity can be achieved.

Anarchy-feminists generally reject statist solutions to women's problems (such as the censorship of pornography in an attempt to reduce violence against women in favor of self-empowerment and direct action). Anarchy-feminist organizing can be characterized by an emphasis on decentralization, participatory decision making and action on a grassroots level. Anarchy-feminists generally believe that the fulfillment of human potential can best be achieved by moving beyond traditional gender roles and encouraging the development of beneficial "masculine" and "feminine" qualities in all people, and equality in all relationships.

Many modern anarchists concentrate on applying the ideals of free will and self-determination to their personal lives. Within this tendency there is an emphasis on the acceptance of a variety of options in the realm of sexuality, family, and interpersonal relationships. Relationships should be based on the free choice and consent of all individuals involved, and not constrained by governmental, religious or societal restrictions. There are many queer anarchists - gay, lesbian, transgendered, and perhaps especially bisexual; anarchism's promotion of the breakdown of traditional categorization schemes seems particularly relevant to those with non-traditional and/or marginalized sexual and gender identities. As with feminists, some gay/lesbian/queer groups embrace anti-authoritarian principles and direct action (for example, AIDS activists who organize underground needle exchange programs and buyer's clubs for non-FDA-approved drugs).

Recognizing that traditional mandates such as marriage, the patriarchal nuclear family, and enforced reproduction have been devised to serve the interests of those in positions of power and authority, anarchists emphasize the exploration of creative, voluntary relationship alternatives such as non-monogamy, extended families, and communal child rearing, in addition to the more common traditional options. Anarchists generally want to get government out of the business of approving personal relationships, rather than extending such approval to same-sex relationships. Anarchist queers also typically oppose efforts to increase the gay presence in oppressive institutions such as the military.

In contrast to classical anarchism's adherence to atheism (largely in response to the destructive influence of traditional authoritarian religious institutions), many modern anarchists emphasize spirituality, both the neo-pagan variety and liberation theology within traditional religions. This reflects the belief that the maximization of human potential necessitates a recognition of the spiritual and transcendental aspects of human personality and culture as well as the rational. In the realm of morality, such anarchists rely on personal responsibility and concern for others rather than on the pronouncements of legal or moral

## Through Religion to Anarchism George Walford

Although it would be going too far to say that all anarchists oppose all forms of religion, we can safely say that nearly all of them would like to do away with the authoritarian versions. Are they justified? Certainly this form of religion has done a great deal of harm, but after taking full account of this we have to add, for a complete picture, that it helped in the emergence of the anarchist movement. It did not set out to do this but it did do it. And, in spite of itself, it is still helping people to become anarchists.

Religion has been with us for many thousands of years, and for most of that period many of the sharpest minds have worked on it. It comes in many different varieties, providing more than enough material for a lifetime's study; nobody can explain it, or account for it, or pronounce any sensible judgment upon it, in one short article. I shall be trying to do just one thing: to show that authoritarian religion helps with the first step towards anarchism.

This word 'religion' covers a wide range of doctrines and practices. Zen Buddhism has a good deal in common with some versions of anarchism, and a group calling themselves Christian atheist anarchists also claim to be religious. Without taking up the question whether such activities have a good claim to the title or not, I leave them aside. Here 'religion' carries its ordinary everyday meaning, it indicates the orthodox doctrines of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism and the organizations promoting them. These (and perhaps one or two more like them) are the great religions. They provide the main weight of religious activity and each of them (except the last) presents a great god, a tremendous, dominating figure, all-powerful, all-knowing. Creator, Lord, master of earth and heaven, disposing not merely of life and death but of eternal life and death.

Buddhism forms an exception, a religion without a god. We in the West sometimes think of it as quite different from the others, but in fact it's not all that special. Like them it presents a dominating hero-figure. It calls him Lord, it offers him prayer and sacrifice, it studies his words and worships his holy relics. It regards him as to some extent a savior; Buddha delayed his own entry into Nirvana in order to spread his message for the sake of others. About the only thing Buddhism doesn't do is to credit him with having created the world. Although Buddha may not be technically divine he's a lot more than human, and Buddhism urges us to follow him on the Noble Eightfold Path. Each of the great religions, Buddhism like the others, offers a figure greater than ourselves. It sets him on one side, the world, the flesh and the devil on the other, and demands that we choose between them.

Having undertaken to show that religion helps with the first step towards anarchism, I am saying that it brings people to believe in personal leaders, something anarchism strongly opposes. But those who come to believe in a personal leader do thereby take the first step towards anarchism. This is so because we all begin life in a condition even farther from anarchism than that. As children and young people we have our interests centered on individual people and personal affairs, taking no interest in wider issues, accepting the society around us in the same unquestioning way as we accept air and gravi-



For example, part of that power relation which is wage slavery consists in making the wage slave an obedient slave by a careful and meticulous technique of training by which the wage slave-to-be is brought to act in as productive a manner for the employer and not otherwise. (This training does not take place only within the factory gates - our system of compulsory education contributes mightily to producing docility.) In other words, relations of domination have the force they do in large part because they endow the dominated characteristics, with real abilities that they did not have before.

What this means for anarchists is that it is not sufficient for eliminating domination and establishing a free and cooperative society merely to eliminate repression. (which is not to say that it shouldn't be done; only that this isn't enough.) For the ability to act in a free and cooperative fashion is not something that one possesses naturally, is not a natural capacity which one already possesses in a fully developed way and which is somehow being stifled by the oppressors. On the contrary, it is also a product of training, of a training in which one is encouraged to act freely and cooperatively, to develop one's own singular capacities and one's ability to think for oneself (so that this training is necessarily a self training). Just as one's domination is something that is made, so one's liberty is something that cannot be simply uncorked, but also has to be made.

If all one does is throw the bums out, one does nothing either to undo the effects of the training which one has received or to actually bring about the ability to live in a cooperative and uncoerced fashion. If throwing the bosses out is all one does, it will not be surprising to find a new set of bosses setting themselves up in short order; for the greater part of the relations of domination will remain, relatively unscathed.

In short, anarchists should not trust to the so-called natural proclivities of human beings toward freedom and cooperation, for there are no such proclivities. Or rather such proclivities are, as proclivities, no stronger than the equally natural human proclivities to dominate and be dominated. The task must be to encourage these proclivities, to make them into really existing practices of freedom and cooperation, for it is only in this way that there can be any realistic hope of bringing about a society without domination.

authorities. Spiritual anarchists generally emphasize the interconnectedness of all life, and their beliefs commonly coincide with those of ecologically oriented, nature-centered anarchists. Yet there remains a substantial atheist element among anarchists who believe that the idea of "sacredness" and a reliance on a "higher order" reinforce traditional hierarchical notions and are inimical to the achievement of full human freedom.

Anarchist ideals are often espoused by youth wit punk, alternative art, rave, "dead-head" and radical student cultures. These young people attempt to escape the injustice and alienation of life in the prevailing consumer society by forming communities of resistance based on direct action and means of self-reliance such as collective living, squatting, info shops and the creation of economic alternatives such as food cooperatives and independent, non-corporate music production and distribution. While these young people accept many of the tenets of classical anarchism (although commonly not under that label), they are typically more concerned with applying the principles of anti-authoritarianism and self-determination in a practical way to their resistance activities and their daily lives. Some contemporary anarchists, however, eschew such "lifestylism," and instead focus on building more formalized groups and networks that can organize for broader social change.

Anarchists are involved with a wide array of publishing projects, from informal one-time 'zines to established newspapers and book publishers with long histories. Anarchists are increasingly making use of the Internet and other means of electronic communication. The Internet has often been described as an example of anarchy in action, and it has indeed grown and prospered with no central governmental authority. Electronic communications provide a way to transcend national borders, and may minimize the importance of cultural barriers such as race and gender as well. However, there is a definite danger that increasing reliance on electronic communication will reinforce economic barriers, creating a society of information-age "haves" and "have nots." Anarchists have used electronic communication to plan events, spread important news items, and exchange information; there are mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups devoted to anarchism and anti-authoritarianism, as well as more ambitious projects such as the Spunk Press electronic archives. Clearly governments fear the freedom of the net, and are increasing their efforts to crackdown on the free flow of information (in the guise of anti-obscenity and anti-terrorism). Other anarchists oppose electronic communications, both because they resist "mediated," non-face-to-face interaction and because of the detrimental environmental effects of technology.

## Conclusion

In summary, anarchism is a diverse, broadly defined philosophy that has been adopted in one form or another by a wide range of individuals and groups, many of whom do not explicitly label themselves as "anarchist." Anarchism can have relevance to all facets of one's existence. In emphasizing freedom, self-determination, personal responsibility, direct action, and the creation of voluntary, cooperative alternatives, anarchism has the vision and the flexibility to provide a viable way to transform one's own life, while working for the radical and lasting social change that will transform the world.



## Spain and its Relevance Today - Part II

Iain MacSaorsa

If instead of condemning that experience [of collaboration], the [anarchist] movement continues to look for excuses for it, the same course will be repeated in the future ... exceptional circumstances will again put ... anarchism on [its] knees before the state" (Juan Gomaz Casas, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI*, page 251).

### Introduction

Spain, in the 1930's, had the largest anarchist movement in the world. At the start of the Spanish "Civil" war, over one and one half million workers and peasants were members of the C.N.T. (the National Confederation of Labor), an anarcho-sindicalist union federation, and 30,000 were members of the F.A.I. (the Anarchist Federation of Iberia). The total population of Spain at this time was 24 million. The anarchist movement was larger, more dynamic and more influential than the corresponding Marxist organizations (the U.G.T. union federation, the Socialist Party, etc.). Since 1868, the history of the Spanish labor and evolutionary movement was dominated by anarchism, a situation unique to Spain in many respects.

Therefore, considering this, the need to understand and know the events of Spain is essential. Firstly, to learn from the activities of our comrades, to learn from their mistakes and, secondly, to find and apply what is still relevant from their history to OUR activities and political program/agenda. Thirdly, to discuss some basic ideas of anarchism, with reference to actual events, which should be clear in people's heads. Hopefully comrades will find this article useful. Needless to say far more could be written on the subject of Spain. This is one view point and should be seen as an aid for the discussion, for further reading and debate and as an indication of what anarchism and anarchists are capable of doing.

### The Start of the Civil War/Revolution

When the Generals revolted against the republic on July the 19th 1936, the government was paralyzed. The only resistance to the fascists came from the working class, first and foremost from those sections organized in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. While the government tried to negotiate with the fascists, offering them spaces in the cabinet at one point, the C.N.T. (and to a lesser degree the radical sections of the U.G.T.) constantly urged people to organize for a general strike, arm themselves and directly resist the coup. When the army did start its uprising, it was met on the streets with the heroism and initiative of the members of the C.N.T. ("Cenetistas") who went on the offensive.

It was the C.N.T./F.A.I. which lead the resistance to the Generals. The members of the U.G.T. followed behind, while the politicians did nothing (as usual). It should be noted that U.G.T. unions in areas where the C.N.T. was strong were totally reformist. In areas where the C.N.T. was organized, but smaller, the U.G.T. was forced to be more radical under the influence of C.N.T. activities and the fear that their members would join the more militant (and effective and modern) organization.

## ANARCHISM AND POWER

by Ron Carrier

A common description of anarchism is that it has as its aim the abolition of the state. Now, while this is certainly correct - it would indeed be hard to find an anarchist who is positively enamored of any government apparatus, be it located in Chicago, Washington, Moscow, or Baghdad, it is not (to my mind) the best way of describing the anarchist goal. Rather, anarchism should be understood as aiming at the abolition of all forms of domination. That is, anarchism is resolutely opposed to any relations between humans in which one decides for another, without the other's consent, how that other is to live and coerces that other into living that way. So anarchism is opposed not only to government, to the police - and military and legislature and judiciary.

It is also opposed to capitalism, in which a few possessing the means of production compel the rest, on pain of starvation, to produce for the profit of those few in return for a wage; and to racism of any form; and to an sort of oppression on the basis of one's sexuality. In place of all this, which is inherently reprehensible (and if you want justification of this claim, try living in an explicit state of being dominated and see what you think of it!), anarchists seek a situation in which everybody determines for one-self as much as possible, in as free and cooperative as can be devised, how one is to live one's life.

So anarchism is opposed to power, right? All we need to do is overthrow all the bosses who are repressing our desire for freedom, and all will be well? Well, not quite. I don't think it's right to identify power with domination and domination with repression, as was just done in the two questions just posed. Heres why.

What is power? It seems to me that power shouldn't be thought of as some mysterious substance which some people (at the top of the heap) possess by some means or other and which others (at the bottom) do not. Rather, power exists only as a certain kind of relation between people in which one person does what another person wants the first person to do. Now, simply described that way, power relations are not inherently relations of domination: one can do what another wants her/him to do because the two of them have both freely consented to this as much as because the latter person has coercive control over the former.

So anarchism, properly- understood, does not seek the abolition of power, in the sense that it does not seek to eliminate the possibility of power relations. For it is hard to see how this could come about without the abolition of any and all social relations, which no anarchist wants! Instead, anarchism seeks to foster and maintain only those power relations which do not involve coercive domination, and to destroy those that do.

Furthermore, not all those power relations which involve domination operate by repression alone. That is, domination does not, to my mind, consist only in keeping people from doing things. Rather, domination also involves a certain positive aspect, in that it involves the dominator acting (not just by denial) upon the one to be dominated (upon both her/his body and mind) so that the dominated will docile and obedient fashion.



1) As Bakunin wrote 60 years earlier "In a free community, collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below" (Bakunin on Anarchism, page 200). For where else could the impetus for a libertarian social revolution come from unless from "below"? Its no coincidence that collectivization was more socialistic in rural collectives as the state was effectively destroyed in many areas (like Aragon) by federations of collectives. As one militant describes the process of collectivization had to be based on free federation "from the bottom up."

"There were, of course, those who didn't want to share and who said that each collective should take care of itself. But they were usually convinced in the assemblies. We would try to speak to them in terms they understood. We'd ask, "Did you think it was fair when the cacique [local boss] let people starve if there wasn't enough work?" and they said, "Of course not". They would eventually come around. Don't forget, there were three hundred thousand collectivists [in Aragon], but only ten thousand of us had been members of the C.N.T.. We had a lot of educating to do". Felix Carrasquer, quoted in Free Women of Spain, page 79. An anarchist society cannot be created "overnight", to assume so would be to imagine that we could enforce our ideas on a pliable population. Socialism can only be created from below, by people who want it and understand it, organizing and liberating themselves. The lessons of Russia should have cleared any such illusions about "socialist" states long ago. The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made in the process of liberation by people themselves are always minor compared to the results of creating authorities which eliminate such "ideological errors" by destroying the freedom to make mistakes. This only destroys freedom as such, the only real basis for socialism.

2) Such ideas would, now, only be appropriate to rank and file organizations created in and by struggle in opposition to the Trade Unions. The AFL cannot be reformed, so why try? The last 70 years have contained enough proof of this.

3) As an aside, Durruti is echoing Bakunin who said "The purpose of the Alliance [ie anarchist federation] is to promote the Revolution... it will combat all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people, either by cliques or individuals. The Alliance will promote the Revolution only through the NATURAL BUT NEVER OFFICIAL INFLUENCE of all members of the Alliance" (Bakunin on Anarchism, edited by Sam Dolgoff, page 387).

After the resistance of the 19th of July, the Generals' coup had been defeated in TWO THIRDS of Spain. It is clear that as the "cenetistas" fought and died on the barricade they would not be risking their lives for some poxy republic. They unleashed the most profound social revolution in the history of the world (so far at least ...).

## The Revolution

In the heady days after the 19th of July (people burning money was a common sight in the streets of Barcelona, for example) the initiative and power truly rested in the hands of the rank and file members of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. No positive directives came from the C.N.T. committees (who were to busy doing other things as we shall see later). It was ordinary people, under the influence of Faistas (members of the F.A.I.) and C.N.T. militants no doubt, who, after defeating the uprising, got production, distribution and consumption started again (under more egalitarian arrangements of course) as well as organizing, and volunteering (in their thousands) to join the militias which were to be sent to free those parts of Spain under Franco.

In every possible way, the working class of Spain were creating by their own actions a new world based on their own ideas of social justice and freedom (ideas inspired, of course, by anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism). The full extent of this revolution cannot be covered here. All that can be done is highlight a few points of special interest and hope that these will give some indication of the breath of these events and encourage people to read a few of the books listed in Appendix 1.

All industry in Catalonia was placed either under workers self-management or workers control (that is, either totally taking over ALL aspects of management, in the first case, or, in the second, controlling the old management). There was, of course, a direct relationship between the size and influence of the C.N.T. and the number and internal nature of the collectives formed. Workers in the U.G.T. were generally inspired to action by the practical example of the C.N.T. In some cases whole town and regional economies were transformed into federations of collectives.

The example of Alcoy (population 45 000) can be given as a typical example. "Everything was controlled by the syndicates. But it must not therefore be assumed that everything was decided by a few higher bureaucratic committees without consulting the rank and file members of the union. Here libertarian democracy was practiced. As in the C.N.T. there was a reciprocal double structure; from the grass roots at the base.... upwards and in the other direction a reciprocal influence from the federation of these same local units at all levels downwards. from the source back to the source." (Gaston Leval, quoted in "The Anarchist Collectives", Ed Sam Dolgoff, page 105) It should be noted this was obviously before the counter-revolution got under way and that the organs of the collectives were NOT identical to the corresponding organs of the C.N.T., although they did operate like the C.N.T. did before the Civil War.

In practice, until sabotaged by the state, the collectives proved that ALL aspects of industry and agriculture can be operated better by the workers themselves (using anarchist organization) than under capitalism. Collectivization was not full socialism (although it was definitely socialistic). For example, most collectives kept the use of money (in some



form or another) as well as distributing goods according to DEED not NEED (ie, saying that so much labour is "worth" so much and so retaining value relationships from capitalism). Obviously, food was distributed free in some cases (to the old, sick, etc. and militia at the front) but the main rationing schemes were still based on certain (not all) capitalist principles. As Gaston Leval states, "it was not... true socialisation, but a form of workers neo-capitalism, a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates" (Gaston Leval, "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution", p227/8). This should be remembered, as should the last point. In no way can this truly detract from the positive achievements of working class self-management and the anarchist re-organization of the economy.

In general, the collectives created most of the structural framework of an anarcho-communist economy, while, due to the concrete realities of Spain (its isolation economically and politically, the lack of other widespread revolutionary movements in other countries and its agrarian economic base) it could not apply some of the social aspects (abolition of wage labor, money, etc).

The militias set to fight the war were organized in true anarchist fashion and often defeated better armed, better trained and more numerous detachments of the fascist army. There was no rank, no saluting and no officer class. Everybody was equal. The militias did use ex-officers, but only as advisors. The direction of the war rested in the militia committees, under the control of the front line fighters who could countermand and replace delegates. The militias contained both men and women. Ironically enough, Trotskyites always say how much they approve of the militias and how "democratic" they were, without ever mentioning how Trotsky removed all these features from the Red Army before and during the Russian Civil War.... When a militia entered a town or village, they did not force the people to join collectives or dictate the form social life would take. All they did was to ensure the population could organize their own lives, as the population saw fit.

On the social front, anarchist organizations created rational schools, a libertarian health service, social centers, and so on. The Mujeres Libres (free women) combated the traditional role of women in Spanish society, empowering thousands both inside and outside the anarchist movement (much to the annoyance of some male anarchists ...). The story of the Mujeres Libres would take an article in itself (See the Free Women of Spain by Martha A. Ackelsberg for more information on this very important organization). This activity on the social front only built on the work started long before the start of the war, for example the unions often funded rational schools, workers centers and so on. This (very) short summary cannot do justice to the achievements of our comrades in Spain. The booklist in Appendix I contains material for those who wish to find out more.

It should come as no surprise that anarchism did create the seeds of a new world and that this world operated infinitely better than capitalism (or state socialism). And we must also remember that anarchism can never be created "overnight". Between capitalism and a classless society (full communist anarchism), there will, of necessity, be a "transition" period after a successful insurrection. This period will be marked by the need to create anarchist structures and social relationships (consolidating the revolution) while defending this task (by force, if necessary). Its first step will be to smash the state and ensure a new

ity and solidarity.

By way of a conclusion anarchism must be relevant to working class people. We must advocate anarchist tactics and organization in all struggles. It is clear that to organize anarchists is not enough. We must encourage the organization of the working class, otherwise "revolutionary" ideas are only the domain of professional revolutionaries. People, under these circumstances, cannot formulate and apply their own agenda and so remain passive tools in the hands of leaders. By permanent libertarian social organization, people can control their own struggles and so, eventually, their own lives. It accustoms people, through practice, to self-management and so anarchism.

The experience of the C.N.T. shows this. This was the great strength of the Spanish Anarchist movement. It was a movement "that, in addition to possessing a revolutionary ideology [sic], was also capable of mobilizing action around objectives firmly rooted in the life and conditions of the working class.... It was this ability periodically to identify and express widely felt needs and feelings that, together with its presence at community level, formed the basis of the strength of radical anarchism, and enabled it to build a mass base of support" (Nick Rider, *The Practice of Direct Action: The Barcelona rent strike of 1931*, page 99, from *For Anarchism*, pages 79-105). As Malatesta made clear, "to encourage popular organizations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our program... anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves... we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance" (*Life and Ideas*, page 90).

This can only occur via popular self-organization. Bearing this in mind, we must also be aware of the dangers in anarcho-syndicalism. The anarchist movement must not be (con)fused with the mass organizations of the working class ("unions"). The "union" (by which I mean any social organization organized in a libertarian manner, within and without workplaces, and definitely not reformist trade unions) movement and anarchism follow different, but related paths. These "unions" should be encouraged by anarchists and be as anarchistic as possible in their operation and practice, but they must never replace the anarchist movement (ie certain aspects of anarcho-syndicalism as tactics, not principles).

In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed. That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision making about social and economic issues. When it comes to mass movements (and a revolution is the ultimate mass movement), the role of anarchists is clear: encourage direct action, decentralized, federal delegate organizations based on direct discussion and direct decision making and destroy the state. Not to do so is to repeat the mistakes of all previous revolutions and which were the undoing of the largest anarchist movement in the world.

Notes:



unions are by their very nature reformist and never revolutionary. The revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work within their ranks as well as outside, but it cannot be the normal definition of the union function." (Errico Malatesta, *Life and Ideas*, page 117). [2]

The actions of our comrades did make the C.N.T. a revolutionary organization, did make it operate in an anarchist manner. However, the tactics they used over time changed. In the late 20s and early 30s, the F.A.I. started to fight reformism by being elected to every union post they could. In the short term it worked, but in the longer term it meant that "if the FAI influenced the CNT, the opposite was also true... anarchism lost much of its special character when anarchists tried to lead the anarcho-sindicalist federation. In fact, the anarchists were run by the union..." and "blinkered by participation in union committees, the FAI became incapable of a wider vision" (*Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, Jose Peirats, page 239). This proved to be the undoing of the anarchist movement as the reality of being a union official resulted in militants becoming syndicalists first, anarchists second.

As the rank and file militants left for the front, the "moral tone" of the organization fell. The rank and file were too busy constructing collectives and fighting to effectively control the committees. In this situation, the actions of the committees could not be effectively stopped by the normal C.N.T. procedures (plenums, etc.) and by the time anything could be done to stop the consequences of the initial betrayal of the 20th of July, it was too late.

This problem of "officialdom" was seen by many anarchists. As Durruti noted "no" anarchists in the union committees unless at ground level. In these committees, in the case of conflict with the boss, the militant is forced to compromise to arrive at an agreement. The contacts and activities which come from being in this position, push the militant towards bureaucracy. Conscious of this risk, we do not wish to run it. Our role is to analyze from the bottom the dangers which beset an union organization like ours. No militant should prolong his (sic) job in committees, beyond the time allotted to him (sic). No permanent and indispensable people" (*Durruti The People Armed*, page 216) [3]. However, the dangers of bureaucracy could not be defeated by the tactics of the F.A.I. in the 30's nor by those anarchists who considered themselves as syndicalists first.

5) As noted earlier, for anarchism to succeed the state must not be ignored but smashed and "replaced" by a libertarian structure(s) to coordinate activity. In his history of the FAI, Juan Gomez Casas (an active Faista in 1936) makes this clear: "How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the unanimous masses'. In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions as well as ... their political organisations in the district and communities" (*Anarchist Organization: the History of the FAI*, page 188). As the Friends of Durruti said "A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers organizations". (*The Friends of Durruti accuse, from Class War on the Home Front*, page 34).

Only this, the creation of viable anarchist organizations can ensure that the state and capitalism can be destroyed and replaced with a just system based on liberty, equal-

one is not formed.

## The Counter-revolution

The "May Days" of 1937 signified the effective defeat of the Spanish Revolution. The state felt strong enough to crush the power of the working class and remove the last remains of their conquests from the 19th of July. The leaders of the CNT and FAI urged compromise, and so aided the state and the counterrevolution. So what went wrong? What had allowed the social revolution to be sidetracked and defeated so quickly. Sad to say, it was the actions of the CNT-FAI and, in particular, the actions of certain "influential militants" (or leaders). For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organizations which can effectively replace the state and the market, that is to create a widespread libertarian organization for social and economic decision making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by doing this can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed.

For example, if the state is not smashed, it continue and get stronger as it will be the only medium for wide scale decision making. This will result in revolutionaries having to work within it, trying to influence it since no other means exist to reach collective decisions. This problem confronted the leaders of the CNT on the 20th of July. They interpreted the needs of the situation as "either we seize power or we collaborate with political parties" (and so the state) in effect, "anarchist dictatorship" or "democracy".

While the rank and file members of the CNT (and other sections of the working class inspired by the CNT) were in the process of constructing a new world, clearly showing in practice that they were in favor of anarchism, the "influential militants" in CNT committees were stabbing them in the back. Instead of pursuing anarchist policies (and past CNT policy as indicated from congresses), the committee members started to pursue their own policies. Far from NOT seizing power themselves (as the Trotskyites lament, their definition of "workers power"), the CNT and FAI committee members seized power within their own organizations. Without receiving any mandate from the CNT syndicates they claimed to be delegates from, the leading committees decided off their own backs not to talk of libertarian communism but only of the fight against fascism. In practice the committees had been separated from the rank and file and their members transformed from delegates into representatives ("leaders" in every sense of the word) who started to make policy decisions on the rank and files behalf, without bothering to consult them.

On the 20th of July, instead of, for example, organizing a joint plenum of CNT and UGT syndicate delegates plus delegates from previously unorganized workplaces (mandated by the rank and file) in order to discuss the situation and possibly create a permanent delegate federation to coordinate the revolution and the war against the fascists, the CNT-FAI committees sent a delegation of its members to meet the leader of the Catalan Government "The delegation ... was intransigent .... [e]ither Companys [the Catalan president] must accept the creation of a Central Committee [of Anti-Fascist Militias] as the ruling organization or the CNT would CONSULT THE RANK AND FILE AND EXPOSE THE REAL SITUATION TO THE WORKERS. Companys backed down." (p216, *Durruti The People Armed* (my emphasis)) This shows clearly the role of the CNT committee members (see also "Towards a Fresh Revolution" by the Friends of Durruti). They used their new found influ-



nice in the eyes of Spain to unite with the leaders of other organizations/parties but not in rank and file.

This process led to the creation of the "Central Committee of Antifascist Militias", in which political parties as well as labor unions were represented. This committee was not made up of mandated delegates, but of representatives of existing organizations, nominated by committees. Instead of a genuine federal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighborhood assemblies) the C.N.T. created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, ordinary working class people expressed in their assemblies.

The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored. His first betrayal of anarchist principles led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution and so the civil war. In the name of "antifascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff "both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power" (The Anarchist Collectives, p40)

It is clear that anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. "Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name ... Anti-fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed" (Ethel McDonald, Workers Free Press, Oct 1937). To justify their collaboration, the leaders of the CNT-FAI claimed not to collaborate would have led to a civil war within the civil war. In practice, while paying lip service to the revolution, the communists and republicans attacked the collectives, murdered anarchists, cut supplies to collectivized industries (even war industries) and disbanded the anarchist militias after refusing to give them weapons and ammunition (preferring to arm the Civil Guard in the rearguard in order to crush the CNT and so the revolution). By collaborating, a civil war was not avoided, one occurred anyway, with the working class as its victims, as soon as the state felt strong enough. Garcia Oliver (soon to be the first ever anarchist minister of justice) stated that collaboration was necessary and that the CNT had "renounc[ed] revolutionary totalitarianism, which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by anarchist and Confederal [CNT] dictatorship. We had confidence in the word and in the person of a Catalan democrat" Companys (who had in the past jailed anarchists). Which means that only by working with the state, politicians and capitalists can an anarchist revolution be truly libertarian!

The continued existence of the state ensured that economic federalism (ie extending the revolution under the direction of the syndicates) could not develop naturally nor be developed far enough in all places. Due to the political compromises of the C.N.T. the tendencies to coordination and mutual aid could not develop. For example, in Barcelona during the first two months of the revolution there were few real attempts at economic federation between industries. While understandable in the circumstances; ie the need to get production going again placed federalism down the list of things to do, it did lead to some collectives becoming "collective capitalists" as the market could not be replaced by an integrated social organism. In addition, due to the existence of rich and poor capitalist firms before the revolution, there were rich and poor collectives as well. Since there did

not, it was a federal, decentralized body, based on direct discussion and decision making from the bottom up. "The CNT tradition was to discuss and examine everything", according to one militant. As Bakunin said "the International [ie the union movement] must be a people's movement, organized from the bottom up by the free spontaneous action of the masses. There must be no secret governmentism, the masses must be informed of everything... All affairs of the International must be thoroughly and openly discussed without evasions and circumulations" (Bakunin on Anarchism, edited by Sam Dolgoff, page 408).

The C.N.T. rejected full-time officials. Instead union officials were part-timers who did union work either after work hours or, if they had to miss work, they were paid their normal wage. Hence they were in touch with the union members and shared their experiences and needs as they continued to be workers. This reduced the tendency for union bureaucracies to develop or for officials to become an (unofficial) governing caste within the organizations. This created a viable and practical example of an alternative method by which society could be organized. A method which was based on the ability of ordinary people to direct society themselves and which showed in practice that special ruling authorities are undesirable and unnecessary. It also proves that anarchist organization is more revolutionary than "socialist" (i.e. Marxist) forms (which are, at best, more "democratic" forms of capitalist/statist structures).

2) The C.N.T. was organized, primarily, on a local basis. The industrial union federations (ie union federations for one industry) were weak. The real base of the C.N.T. was the regional/local federation of all industrial unions in an area. Hence class wide issues could be fought, industrial divides overcome and solidarity action spread across industry. The C.N.T., because of this, fought in and out of the factory for social issues, helping to reduce the tendency towards concentrating only on economics as "the demands of the CNT went much further than those of any social democrat: with its emphasis on true equality, autogestation [self-management] and working class dignity, anarcho-syndicalism made demands on the capitalist system could not possibly grant to the workers" (J. Romero Maura, The Spanish case, page 79, from Anarchism Today, edited by James Joll et al. This short essay is very good summary of the history and practice of the C.N.T. up to 1936 (although I feel that it gets certain aspects of Bakunin's ideas on "syndicalism" wrong)).

This is not to ignore the importance of industry wide federations of unions, of course. It just indicates that such forms of industrial unionism can, and do, concentrate on partial aspects of the class struggle and do not generate the same class and social awareness as regionally based organizations.

3) Direct action was used in every case. This raised the consciousness and militancy of the working class better than any election campaign. The benefits of "Doing it Yourself" was seen in practice. This, combined with anarchist organization, resulted in a movement in which people could transform their assumptions about what was possible, necessary and desirable.

4) The role of anarchists, as anarchists. Without the actions and ideas of anarchists, the C.N.T. would have soon become the same as any other union. The anarchists raised the "moral tone" of the unions and ensured they did not degenerate into reformism. This had been pointed out by many people before hand, for example Malatesta wrote: "trade



The centralization which occurred within the C.N.T. after 19th July did not "just happen". There are institutional reasons why it occurred. These come from anarcho-syndicalist practice. The fusion of anarchism and the union movement ("syndicalism") is the basic idea of anarcho-syndicalism. The unions are enough in themselves and, through the daily struggle for reforms, can lead to socialism. In practice, this does not quite work (unfortunately). Anarcho-syndicalist unions must operate within the same basic situation as normal unions, therefore they come under the same pressures and influences.

These pressures of working within the capitalist system (in a unionist manner) produces in all unions the following tendencies: 1) They become bureaucratic/hierarchical, ie to generate "leaders" or union bosses separated from the rank and file. In order to get reforms, the union must negotiate and be prepared to compromise (which in practice means to get their members back to work). This results in the union committees, sooner or later, trying to control their own rank and file. This process of negotiation leads to a leader/led division. 2) To concentrate on short term economic issues. This is due to the need to attract and keep a large union membership. It is clear from its history that the C.N.T. was not immune to these tendencies. For example, the F.A.I. was formed explicitly to combat reformism within the C.N.T. (see Peirats, page 238-9, and Juan Gomaz Casas, page 100, for example).

The actions of the C.N.T. during the revolution had historical precedents. Consistently committees had represented plenums with *fait accompli*'s and acted without mandates (sometimes in ways contrary to C.N.T. policy). However, it must be pointed out this was minimized by the nature of the C.N.T. although it did happen. While anarcho-syndicalism sees these dangers and tries to combat them, it is clear that it can only partially do so in practice. In addition, the idea that by controlling the economy automatically means destroying the state is false. This comes from French revolutionary syndicalism and not anarchism. In effect, it means ignoring the state. And ignoring something does not make it go away. This idea can be seen from some aspects of the Spanish Revolution, ie the working class took over the economy but left the state intact. The C.N.T. leadership collaborated with the state (had they become so used to negotiating that they could not see beyond it?) and the rest is history. However, without the C.N.T. the revolution would not have happened in the first place.

The fact that the revolution occurred at all is a glowing testimony to the independence and militancy of ordinary C.N.T. members. An independence and militancy which the C.N.T. structure unlike marxist unions encouraged and not crushed through centralism. The very structure and practice of the C.N.T. did produce a revolutionary working class the likes of which the world has rarely seen. As Jose Peirats states, "above the union level, the CNT was an eminently political organization.... a social and revolutionary organization for agitation and insurrection" (Jose Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, page 239).

### Lessons

The following positive points can be gathered from the C.N.T. and the Spanish anarchist movement:

1) Its structure encouraged the politicization, initiative and organizational skills of its mem-

not exist the means to coordinate production and distribute goods according to need, attempts at mutual aid were often ad hoc.

This lack of coordination meant that the collectivization could not develop towards full socialization (socialism/communism) plus it made equalizing any differences between collectives much harder to achieve. It also allowed the state to intervene into the economy and, through its control of credit, control the collectives. The October 1936 Collectivization Decree (used by the CNT leadership to "legalize" the revolution!) allowed the state a further way to undermine self-management in industry. This Decree distorted and controlled the revolutionary economy, ensuring that it could develop no further and laid the ground work for its degeneration back towards normal capitalism, which state control of credit (and so the collectives) ensured. Not destroying the state meant that the revolution could never be fully successful economically as politics and economics are bound together so closely. Only under the political conditions of anarchism can its economic conditions flourish and vice versa.

The CNT leaders, from the very start of the revolution, claimed that only by a united ("anti-fascist") front, could fascism be defeated. The leadership gave the rank and file no choice (*a fait accompli*) and, in addition, members at the front were not consulted (most of the "hard-core" anarchists - ie those who were most against compromise - were there) thus reducing opposition to the leadership's line. This *fait accompli* was the most extreme example of similar actions which had occurred periodically in the past; ie the committees controlling the union and not the syndicate assemblies. Usually, CNT plenums, congresses and conferences managed to curb this tendency to a large extent. The leadership centrally controlled the organization, calling plenums at short notice, defining the agenda (which was unheard of in the past) and not distributing information to the union assemblies. The leadership's policy, of "anti-fascism" as opposed to anti-state/anti-capitalism and its actions lead to the defeat of the revolution and so the war.

As Vernon Richards makes clear: "[was it] essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties, that is politicians honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organizations... All the initiative... was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers" (Vernon Richards' *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, page 42). This is a very good book and is recommended. This collaboration gave the state and capitalism a breathing space and time to gather their strength. When the time was right, they counter attacked and destroyed the revolution and their "allies" in the antifascist front, the CNT-FAI.

In the space of two months, the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias was abolished and, having nowhere left to go, the CNT committees sent 4 representatives into the government as ministers. According to *Solidaridad Obrera* (the CNT paper) this meant that "the government has stopped being an oppressive force against the working class .. with the participation of the CNT, the state and government no longer oppress the people" This is a sick joke considering that soon after the state decided to crush the collectives by



force and provoked the May Day events (during which the "anarchist" ministers, in effect, sided with the state and in the name of anti-fascist "unity" called on the working class to stop resistance).

Spain, by the actions of the ordinary members of the CNT-FAI gave anarchism one of its most glorious moments. Unfortunately, it also gave us one of its worse by the actions of certain "influential militants". In part 2, lessons from the Spanish Revolution and Spanish anarchism.

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## Spain and its Relevance Today - Part 2 Iain MacSaorsa

### Lessons from the Spanish Revolution

"To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves" Errico Malatesta, Life and Ideas, page 36

In part one, we indicated the social revolution that occurred after Franco's military coup was defeated in the streets. We also said that this revolution was undermined by the state and could not develop fully and that this was caused (in part) by the actions of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees. The issue now is what lessons for our struggles and times can be learned from the anarchist movement in Spain and the 1936 revolution? We should not rush to condemn the C.N.T. out of hand. We should search for an explanation of what happened. The fact that anarchists joined a government should prompt the question, was the defeat in Spain a defeat of anarchist theory and tactics OR a failure of anarchists to apply their theory and tactics?

It is clear from the actions of, for example, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution that anarchism is a valid approach to social struggle and revolution. So what made Spain "special"? Firstly, as discussed in part one, the question of antifascist unity. The C.N.T. leaders were totally blinded by this, leading them to support a "democratic" slate against a "fascist" one. While the bases of a new world was being created, inspiring the fight against fascism, the C.N.T. leaders collaborated with the system that spawns fascism, as the Friends of Durruti make clear, "Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism" (Class War on the Home Front, page 30).

The false dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was a fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, etc under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organization and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union/workplace/community/militia/etc. assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organizations organized in an anarchist manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a boss or politician. Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees favored "collaboration" from the top down. This, as indicated in part 1, only favored the state and the (political and economic) bosses. For example, Gaston Leval indicates that the collectivization decree of October 1936 "legalizing collectivization", "distorted everything right from the start" (Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, page 227) and did not allow the collectives to develop beyond a self-managed semi-socialist condition into full socialism.[ 1 ]

Anarcho-sindicalism